United Nations system CEB/2017/5/Add.1

Chief Executives Board for Coordination

Distr.: General
6 November 2017

Original: English

Summary of discussions of the High-level Committee on Management at its thirty-fourth session

(World Intellectual Property Organization headquarters, Geneva, 28 and 29 September 2017)

I. Introduction

1. The thirty-fourth session of the High-level Committee on Management was held at World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) headquarters in Geneva on 28 and 29 September 2017 (for the full introduction, see CEB/2017/5, paras. 1–4).

II. Committee retreat: supporting the Secretary-General in his vision for management reform

2. The objective of the management reform session, which was conducted in retreat mode, was to contribute to the realization of the Secretary-General's vision for management reform in the United Nations Secretariat by sharing experience and lessons learned throughout the system in the course of organizational reform efforts. Committee members were encouraged to share ideas and proposals for joint action that, leveraging their collective strength as a system, could support the Secretary-General in enacting his reform agenda.

3. The discussion was based on some of the key messages outlined by the Secretary-General in his global town hall meeting with staff held on 26 July 2017. The topics, which were introduced by speakers who shared with the Committee the experience of their organizations, were as follows:

(a) Simplify and streamline policies and procedures, including through leveraging technology and innovation;

(b) Decentralize authority;

(c) Focus on accountability and transparency and improved risk management;

(d) Strengthen leadership;

(e) Frontier issues;

(f) Follow-up to innovation labs;

(g) Back-office reform process for field offices.

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Simplification and streamlining of policies and procedures

4. The Chair introduced the topic of simplification and streamlining of policies and procedures, including through leveraging technology and innovation, noting that the Committee could contribute to the realization of the Secretary-General's vision by advancing joint action and leveraging the collective strength of the United Nations system. It was emphasized that the programmes of work of Committee networks needed to align with the Secretary-General's reform priorities and those of all member organizations.

5. The International Labour Organization (ILO) presented its approach and findings from its ongoing business process review and organizational health initiative, characterized by a two-prong approach, including an initial focus on changing mindsets and a review of organizational health and business processes. These reviews were aimed at improving services and making them leaner. The overall review process (department by department) would take 16 to 20 weeks. It was stressed that a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes yielded the most gains.

6. It was observed that staff input to the review was explicitly sought and then informed the full reform process, which became staff-driven, representing a major success factor. The quality of communication was continuously improved and staff in turn progressively embraced the change. This exercise was self-funded as budget savings were reallocated to policy and field portfolios.

7. The United Nations Secretariat made a presentation on a global joint human resources facility for job classification and reference-checking, an initiative developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In 2017, UNDP had developed a methodology for co-designing the business model that was designed to accommodate other organizations and the model had subsequently benefited from a more collective effort. A workshop for organizations willing to join (UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Women, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO)) had been held in August 2017, after which the human resources community had been working with the IT focal points of those organizations. Differences and best practices among organizations had been uncovered. The focus had then shifted to defining the exact scope of reference-checking processes. In addition, on the basis of what each service entailed, an initial costing and pricing model had been developed. Work had begun on developing the terms of reference for a governance board, as well as service-level agreements and memorandums of understanding between UNDP and United Nations Volunteers (UNV). The facility would go live on January 2018 with a phased-in approach, initially servicing UNDP, UNV, UNFPA and UNRWA. The offer of UNDP-UNV to act as administrative anchor — not a headquarters — had been accepted.

8. As a part of the management reform process, the Controller of the United Nations Secretariat outlined the rationale, benefits and challenges expected from the proposed move to a one-year regular budget cycle.

9. In the discussion that followed, many organizations shared their experience with restructuring and the Committee agreed that such sharing of information was very useful and should be encouraged. Several organizations expressed interest in the ILO experience, among others, as they were embarking on similar initiatives. It was noted that these reviews ultimately aim to optimize the deployment of human and financial resources in line with the Secretary General's goal of moving capacity closer to beneficiaries.

10. It was observed that organizations could be more ambitions in streamlining if risks were explicitly defined and a proper culture of consequence was in place. For all organizations, customer focus and accountability was at the centre of management reform efforts.

11. The role of consultancy firms in support of reform processes was discussed, with an emphasis on the value of sharing good — and bad — experiences.

12. The Committee emphasized the absolute importance of investing in adequately resourced, coordinated and sustained communication efforts in support of reform initiatives, including as a means to break the traditional resistance to these initiatives, through shared ownership within the organization.

13. On the proposal to move to a one-year budget, it was recognized that one size does not fit all. Many voluntarily funded organizations are pushing for multi-year budgets or commitments in order to increase predictability. Furthermore, the governance challenges of changes in budget cycles were noted by many participants.

14. As to the global reference-checking facility, it was emphasized that it was a long-term investment that could support mobility. However, predictability was seen as critical for the lead agency. The concept of opt-in and opt-out was not considered to be a favourable approach. Hence, a firm opt-in would be required for a successful start-up. The facility was seen as a positive initiative and many organizations expressed some interest in joining beyond those that had already committed.

15. In conclusion, the Chair noted that trust between the organizations, member States and staff was critical for reforms. Internally, a successful change approach had to be both a top-down (led by an engaged senior management) and a bottom-up process. A broad culture change was needed that would require coherent communication, a balanced approach to flexibility and accountability and an accurate quantification of gains.

Decentralization of authority

16. The introduction to the segment on decentralization of authority noted the Secretary General's emphasis on the importance of the United Nations system being able to trust managers to make decisions and to hold them accountable, representing a shift to a management paradigm that would delegate management to the point of delivery, especially in the areas of human resources, finance, procurement and technology and innovation. This approach included a move from ex-ante controls to ex-post compliance and accountability for results. This segment of the retreat sought to explore different approaches to decentralization adopted and/or envisioned in the United Nations system, together with corresponding successes and challenges.

17. A presentation was made by UNDP on governance of decentralized decision-making and relationships with regional offices and global service centres, revealing an experience of extensive decentralization. One key point made was that decentralization was not conceived as location-specific but rather as function-specific. Furthermore, UNDP put a very strong focus on formalizing lines of authority through an accountability framework. Managers were fully informed, in writing, of their authority and responsibilities. This was critical for a functioning system. A risk-management framework and a risk committee were in place and these processes were carefully documented. The accountability framework was approved by the governing body, giving it a firm standing in the organization.

18. In the discussions on the topic, it was clear that a wide range of approaches to decentralization existed in the system. Funds and programmes were generally very decentralized and emphasized decision-making close to delivery, which was

especially important in emergencies. One issue that was strongly emphasized was the importance of clarity of the role of regional offices and bureaux.

Accountability and transparency and improved risk management

19. In the segment on accountability and transparency and improved risk management, WFP made a presentation on its internal control assurance process. Accountability and transparency were top priorities of the Secretary-General and his June 2017 report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda (A/72/214-E/2018/3) had offered a number of proposals to enhance the tools and oversight by Member States to more effectively report and account for system-wide results.

20. Organizations had made significant progress in this area in the past few years. The Committee, too, had recently produced many relevant policies and tools, such as the framework for vendor sanctions, the reference model on risk management and oversight and the common definitions of fraud and presumptive fraud.

21. The internal control assurance process at WFP had been implemented since 2011 and was a bottom-up assurance process drawing on private sector experience. It consisted of asking a series of questions of Directors in the organization to assess how they were doing in the area of internal controls. This formed the backbone of the assurance system for the Executive Director to be able to ensure that internal controls worked well. When weaknesses were identified based on the statements provided, systems could be changed to improve performance. In implementation, the biggest challenge was to ensure that this remained a value-adding exercise that supported programme delivery and did not become a box-ticking process. This latter point resonated with many organizations. Furthermore, it was noted that for any accountability system to be effective, a system of sanctions was needed.

22. One recurring challenge that was noted was the definition of risk appetite. Organizations must be clear about what risks they were willing to accept and that had to be communicated and endorsed by governing bodies. It was important for managers to exercise decision-making in a properly defined and agreed risk context. Consistent moving of risk upwards in the organization needed to be avoided.

23. The discussion showed that organizations were at different stages with their enterprise risk management initiatives and systems. This was natural and it was therefore important to provide clear information to governing bodies on where organizations were and where they were heading in this regard. This was particularly important as full implementation of such initiatives could take a long time.

United Nations System Leadership Framework

24. The next segment reviewed ongoing initiatives to follow-up the United Nations System Leadership Framework adopted by CEB, steps taken to generate ownership by senior leaders and staff at large and alignments of structures, systems, policies and procedures to enable the desired behaviours. A number of agencies (ILO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP, UNFPA and UNHCR) had volunteered to be part of a group of "champions of the Framework", coordinated by the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), and the group was developing pilot inter-agency initiatives around the Framework.

25. A presentation was made by UNSSC, which focused on the four key behaviours outlined in the Leadership Framework: systems thinking, co-creation, focus on results and driving transformational change. All four behaviours were seen as key to successful United Nations reform.

26. In the discussion that followed, it was noted that many leaders both in the field and at the headquarters of the various organizations came from outside the United Nations system and had different levels of experience in leadership. Those basic skills were sometimes not given enough attention and more focus needed to be placed on the development of fundamental competencies. Several organizations noted their ongoing efforts to develop leadership qualities at the higher levels of their organization, including responsibility as opposed to authority or compliance. However, leadership was seen to apply to all staff at all levels in all locations. There was a need for an organizational culture that empowered employees to become agents of change.

27. In conclusion, the Chair noted that the ultimate purpose of decentralization was to enable organizations to deliver results. It was important to keep that purpose in mind and not get too caught up in the process. One approach might not be suitable for all organizations.

28. The Committee supported the launch of an enterprise risk management community of practice to share knowledge and best practices and put forward further collective proposals in support of this common endeavour.

Priorities, as set out in the strategic plan for 2017–2020

29. The last segment of the retreat was dedicated to considering the Committee's results in the previous period and of its new priorities as set out in the strategic plan for 2017–2020 with a view to adjusting priorities in the light of its engagement to support the Secretary-General in his management reform agenda.

30. The presentation drew on the Committee results paper (CEB/2016/Committee/3) and was followed by a briefing by the Co-Chairs of the Business Innovation Group on the theme "Back-office reform process for field offices".

31. There was general agreement that, as the highest-level forum for management and operational policymaking in the United Nations system, it was essential that appropriate consultations with Committee and network members were conducted throughout the ongoing work on the mapping of "as-is" business operations structures and current back-office functions at the country and regional levels and the development of proposals for options on a default back office, as called for by the Secretary-General in his June 2017 report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda (A/72/124-E/2018/3).

32. It was considered that a new term should be found for "back-office" functions. It was suggested that terms such as "enabling support functions" might be more reflective of the activities involved, without which the system could not deliver on its mandates and would better motivate the staff concerned.

33. The follow-up report by the Secretary-General that would be issued in December 2017 was expected to propose the main trajectories along which the United Nations development system could evolve and might involve integrated United Nations country teams, horizontal reporting lines, new resident coordinator system governance, etc. This could have a major impact on the corresponding operational support infrastructure.

34. The Committee stood ready to support these transformational changes with the necessary collective action, including by reorienting the work of its networks, as required.

35. In the general discussion, UNDP confirmed that it remained available to provide services to other organizations as it had done for many years. This availability was

not linked to being the custodian of the resident coordinator system. Other organizations might put themselves forward as potential service providers for clients other than their internal users. It was noted that countries were different and different approaches would be required in different locations. However, a key item for anyone providing services in the field would be predictability of volumes and demands. Without predictability, it was difficult or even impossible to put the appropriate capacity in place.

36. Regardless of who provided services, the Committee noted the need for adequate pricing models and governance arrangements. Clients might be a part of such governance frameworks and there might be a need to consider a "fire-wall" between service delivery and the programmatic function of the service provider in order to ensure quality of service.

37. The Committee supported the Secretary-General's vision for management reform, which represented a paradigm shift bringing decision-making closer to the point of delivery, a major re-thinking of support functions towards simplification, decentralization and flexibility, a culture of accountability with strong performance management and effective protection for whistle-blowers.

38. As individual organizations, Committee members were at different stages in their respective reform efforts: some were well ahead and some were just about to start. But there was a common thrust in all their efforts and many common challenges and there would ultimately be a common assessment of how well organizations performed, as a United Nations system, in the eyes of public opinion and of the people they served.

39. The Committee agreed to review its strategic plan at its next session to ensure that it was fully aligned with ongoing reform processes and emerging frontier issues.

40. The Committee received a briefing from UN-Women on the Secretary-General's United Nations system gender strategy, and discussed how to best support and implement it across the system. The Committee heard from member organizations on strategies that had worked and challenges encountered in their pursuit of gender parity and broader diversity objectives.

41. An approach to achieving gender parity that has produced noticeable results within the organization was shared by UNAIDS. The starting point was long-term top management commitment and sufficient funding. Among the initiatives UNAIDS undertook to achieve gender parity were a successful leadership programme for female staff at the P-4 and P-5 levels and a recently introduced mentoring programme.

42. In the subsequent discussion, the Committee expressed commitment to achieving gender parity in the United Nations system and strong appreciation for the gender parity strategy. Many members welcomed ambitious target-setting and cautioned against them being too linear, pointing out the need to consider such factors as expected vacancy rates, the specific situation in the diverse entities, and the different external labour markets. Some organizations expressed the need for a joint sourcing strategy for women to be developed since the current female talent pool might be insufficient to achieve gender parity, especially in senior, deep-field and technical roles. A number of organizations noted that efforts and initiatives to achieve gender parity needed to ensure buy-in from all, including male staff members, in order to ensure the necessary culture change.

43. Staff federations expressed appreciation for the work done by the gender parity working group and noted that some essential elements might still need to be reviewed in the proposed strategy. Concern was expressed about a potential adverse effect on the geographical distribution of staff given the current emphasis on gender parity. It was noted that many departments currently had a majority of female staff and

clarification was requested on how the strategy would address situations where the parity challenge was not about promoting women.

III. Duty of care for United Nations system personnel and human resources matters

44. The Committee received an interim report from its Task Force on Duty of Care, chaired by Kelly Clements, Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Committee Vice-Chair.

45. This item had been at the centre of the Committee's agenda for two years, with an emphasis on high-risk environments. The United Nations was being asked to "stay and deliver" in increasingly challenging environments, and the application of the programme criticality framework gave organizations guidance in being selective about the presence required in such environments. Such critical operations came with significant risks to the United Nations workforce — not only international staff but, increasingly, the large number of local staff and the affiliate workforce on the ground as well. The Task Force had been working on better risk management, including concrete measures to identify, mitigate and manage risk.

46. The Task Force represented a new approach to the Committee's work, defined by its cross-functional composition and integrated cooperation among United Nations system technical networks and agency representation, which facilitated concurrent rather than sequential methods of working.

47. Further impetus was given to this work following the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group meeting of 12 July 2017 on the theme "Engagement and well-being of staff, in particular in field settings", at which the Secretary-General asked the Task Force to expedite work on duty of care for all staff, including a focus on national staff and on psychosocial welfare.

48. The interim report covered the following priorities:

(a) Health risk analysis and mapping methodology: a draft assessment framework was presented and would be ready for launch by end-2017;

(b) Implementation of systematic health support planning: this would be an ongoing and iterative process as risk management was a continuous process. The aim was to pilot the process in 20 duty stations in 2017 and 20 more in 2018;

(c) Establishment of an overarching United Nations Psychosocial and Healthcare Policy Framework: a draft United Nations Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy was presented and would be ready for launch by end-2017. This was of critical importance as personnel and managers in the field had indicated that the main toll working in dangerous locations was psychological;

(d) Review of compensation, benefits and entitlements for locally recruited staff serving in high-risk environments from a duty of care perspective: this was part of the ongoing ICSC review on the use and compensation of local workforce, in which the Human Resources Network was actively engaged;

(e) A comprehensive pre-deployment management package for staff and their families, including a system-wide resilience briefing: the draft package was expected to be completed in February 2018;

(f) Standards for working and living conditions for staff deployed in high risk environments: these guidelines were targeted for delivery in February 2018.

49. The United Nations Medical Director presented the work on a health risk assessment tool conducted under the umbrella of the Task Force. She highlighted the need for health support planning to be conducted through a clear risk-based approach. The assessment was currently being piloted in a number of duty stations, in close cooperation with the respective United Nations country teams. It had resulted in a gap analysis as compared to minimum standards of medical care, taking into account the specifics in each duty station, current internal medical services and the prevailing health facilities at each location. Following discussions with country teams on possible improvement actions, residual risk heat maps were created to prioritize necessary investments in health services, resulting in comprehensive health support plans for the prioritization of any additional resources, differentiating between mandatory and recommended measures.

50. Another element of the work on duty of care was the interdisciplinary work on a draft United Nations Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management of the United Nations Secretariat presented the draft Strategy, highlighting that the results of a recent comprehensive survey among 17,000 staff in 11 United Nations entities had indicated a strong call for action in this area given the prevalence of mental health-related risks and conditions, including exposure to anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders and hazardous drinking among the surveyed workforce. The draft strategy was focusing on seven key areas, including strengthening psychosocial support and mental health services, reducing stigma associated with such health challenges, initiating prevention interventions, creating a workplace well-being programme, reviewing health insurance and social protection provisions, quality assurance of psychosocial programmes and the production of a multidisciplinary work plan.

51. The Assistant Secretary-General confirmed that the Human Resources Network would retain overall ownership to finalize the draft Strategy and revert to Committee with an implementation plan.

52. The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Safety and Security of the United Nations Secretariat welcomed the work of the Task Force highlighting a continuing degradation of the global security environment that was likely to exist in the foreseeable future. He noted that the number of direct attacks on United Nations personnel had increased from 35 to 65 in 2016. While the number of incidents was on the rise, the number of deaths related to such incidents was declining, proving that safety- and security-related efforts of the United Nations were effective. Continued attention to minimum security risk measurements remained necessary, however.

53. The Under-Secretary-General noted that road crashes had been a leading cause of death and serious injury to United Nations personnel. The Inter-Agency Security Management Network, in collaboration with United Nations Medical Directors and fleet management experts, had recently completed and endorsed a system-wide internal United Nations Road Safety Strategy. The Strategy was designed to guide the United Nations system to improve road safety in a sustainable and coordinated manner. On the other areas of duty of care, he noted the importance of further work on evacuation and relocation, including for local staff, and related residential security measures.

54. The representative of UNFPA, the hosting agency for the United Nations Cares programme, noted its previous contributions to specific duty-of-care issues. An external evaluation had recognized the programme as "mostly effective and well received". She highlighted the assessment of the Human Resources Network, based on input from an interdisciplinary team, to recommend the mainstreaming of the 10 minimum standards into general occupational health and safety provisions, the

integration of the dignity and inclusion work into larger diversity and inclusion efforts of the United Nations System Staff College, and to request the United Nations Medical Directors to propose a way forward on the future provision of post-exposure prophylaxis kits. She noted that the Committee might discuss those recommendations in the light of the current duty-of-care discussions in order to explore if the successful model of United Nations Cares could contribute to the broader challenges at hand.

55. In the subsequent discussion, representatives of staff federations thanked the Task Force for the work thus far, noting that a focus on national staff was welcome. They noted the likely resource implications and emphasized that the matters at hand, in particular those relating to psychosocial well-being and health, needed to be taken seriously.

56. Several participants renewed their commitment to the work of the Task Force, including through the necessary resources. They highlighted the need for field-based agencies to continue to work together more closely on these matters, including at the country level. The importance of appropriate medical coverage across personnel categories was stressed, as was the necessity for further stigma reduction relating to psychosocial disorders. The work of United Nations Cares on general health promotion in these areas was considered valuable. There was general appreciation for the need to address duty of care in a strictly risk-based manner, integrating it adequately into larger enterprise risk management approaches. The issue of providing better support for victims of malicious acts, including survivors and families, was raised as a matter that needed further attention.

57. One of the expected outcomes of the comprehensive work of the Task Force would be an assessment of actions that were under the purview of management and those that would require engagement with member States in the respective governing bodies.

58. The Task Force noted its objective of "going beyond the minimum", which reflected the responsibility of the United Nations system to pursue duty of care for its workforce, irrespective of contractual status.

59. The Task Force noted the need for a more proactive assessment and management of risks beyond security. Security risks were well managed through the security risk management and programme criticality frameworks. Yet the dangers of psychological strain, poor living conditions and lack of access to medical care were not always looked at in a sufficiently proactive and systematic manner and were often addressed after the fact, including through such mechanisms as boards of inquiries. The functions and responsibilities of risk management varied across agencies. For example, in some cases they were situated within existing senior security management committees or senior management groups.

60. In recognition of these complex responsibilities for personnel in high-risk environments, the Committee decided to develop a risk-management framework specific to duty of care, including a structured evaluation process with a dashboard, standards and indicators, that would provide senior management in the organization with clear information on local hazards and how they needed to be addressed.

61. The proposed risk-management framework would aim to look at threat and hazards with associated prevention and mitigation measures; allow for informed decisions on whether to accept the residual risk; provide for adequate communication of that residual risk to staff in high-risk locations; and provide for staff to accept the residual risk.

62. It was recognized that much of the work being done in relation to high-risk environments, which needed to be given priority, could be leveraged for application

to staff in other environments. The Task Force would look further into issues relating to duty of care for all staff and report to Committee on possible ways to address them.

63. The Committee decided to request that a further review on the future of the United Nations Cares Programme be carried out, under the broader umbrella of the Task Force on Duty of Care, by a small group of representatives with decision-making authority, to be nominated by Committee members and to be selected among the relevant constituencies in this area of work (human resources offices, medical directors, etc.). The review would aim to integrate the United Nations Cares implementation model and/or network in the Duty of Care objectives, and would have to be completed by June 2018, as this was the time period covered by the currently available funds.

64. The Committee received a briefing by the Chair of ICSC on its session held in July 2017. He highlighted in particular the discussions on the post adjustment methodology, pointing out that the Commission had modified the operational rules for transition in order to accommodate some of the concerns raised earlier by staff and the management of organizations. He acknowledged the ongoing discussions on gender parity and duty of care, confirming that the Commission was willing to carefully consider them in its deliberations.

65. The Chair of the Committee highlighted the importance of the work of ICSC in support of the Secretary-General's ongoing management reform efforts and the linkages between the topics on the ICSC agenda with the work on Duty of Care and gender parity.

66. The Co-Chair of the Human Resources Network complemented the briefing by the Vice-Chair of ICSC. She noted that organizations were looking forward to a collaborative approach in continuing the recent post adjustment discussions in order to ensure the necessary trust of all stakeholders in the global post adjustment system. She expressed appreciation for the work of ICSC on the review of the hardship classification methodology, noting that further discussions would be needed to adequately address the situation of staff in duty stations that were classified as "family duty stations" yet provided no proper living conditions for families of staff. She noted the importance of deliberations on the review of staff categories, in particular with regard to national professional officers, in support of the Secretary-General's reform efforts.

67. Representatives of staff federations reiterated their request for a continued review of the results of the recent place-to-place survey in order to restore confidence of staff in the results and the need to reinstate the previously existing operational rules.

68. Some field-based organizations expressed their concern that the recent methodology changes in the 2016 round of place-to-place surveys might unduly and negatively affect pay levels and morale of staff in deep-field duty stations. The Vice-Chairman of ICSC confirmed that the rules as decided at its previous session would be applicable to such field duty stations.

69. Both the Chair of the Committee and the Co-Chair of the Human Resources Network expressed their appreciation to the outgoing Vice-Chair of ICSC for his interaction with the Committee throughout his term.

70. The High-level Committee on Management confirmed its continued willingness to actively engage in the discussions with ICSC, in particular in the context of the second phase of the comprehensive compensation review, the review of the pensionable remuneration scales and ongoing post adjustment discussions.

71. The Committee noted its expectation that the process to further review and improve the cost-of-living survey methodology should go beyond purely statistical discussions to include procedural and legal risk considerations. Such a review should be conducted in full cooperation with the organizations, including the agreement on terms of reference and the selection of a suitable external consultant.

72. The Committee confirmed the need, as expressed by the Human Resources Network, to address the situation of staff with families serving in hardship duty stations that were not conducive to family life in a flexible and pragmatic manner.

73. The Committee noted the importance of attractiveness as an employer to support the United Nations gender parity strategy and the importance of ICSC decisions to enable the general organizational reform programmes that were ongoing in many organizations.

IV. Innovation

74. As part of the executive session, the Committee was briefed on the preparation of the High-level Committee on Programmes for the CEB discussion on the theme "Frontier issues and the norm-setting role of the United Nations system" and possible avenues along which to develop the Committee's contribution to this topic were discussed, in particular with respect to the impact of big data and artificial intelligence on the world of work.

75. The Committee received a briefing from the CEB secretariat on frontier issues and the norm-setting role of the United Nations system. The Director of the CEB secretariat informed the Committee that the Secretary-General had requested CEB to function more as a think tank, attending only to programme and management issues that could not be resolved elsewhere. In order for CEB to maximize its collective impact, discussions would be focused, faster and agile, while strictly adhering to the guidance and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Committee was informed that four topics would be addressed by CEB at its session to be held in November 2017: artificial intelligence, biotechnology, cyberspace and the impact of new technologies on peace and security. The CEB discussion would explore further opportunities for the United Nations system to utilize its strengths in convening stakeholders and supporting norm-setting in these areas.

76. The CEB secretariat presented the results of a CEB survey on frontier issues, undertaken in preparation for its November 2017 session. The survey had yielded nearly 300 responses from 47 entities, revealing interesting and innovative work (both normative and operational) across a broad range of themes and utilizing a wide array of technologies. This undertaking aimed to provide insights into the nature and scale of some of the more progressive work agencies were pursuing to help to manage the opportunities and risks of emerging technologies and direct them towards mandate delivery and more broadly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

77. While the responses had established that United Nations entities were embracing innovation in their programming and/or to improve service delivery, much of this work appeared to be tentative or limited — i.e., it remained at the proposal/conceptual stage, was being pilot-tested, was confined to a particular country context or leveraged only a small potential of the technological capability, etc. In particular, partnerships with the private sector featured in many submissions but further opportunities should be explored to scale up or intensify efforts. There might be a potential for exchange of lessons or collaboration among United Nations entities where similar work was being pursued.

78. Results highlighted that the United Nations system was already playing an important role in supporting Member States in their efforts to harness new technologies for sustainable development and to address normative and regulatory challenges arising from technological advances. In some domains, such as biotechnology and information and communication technologies in the context of international peace and security, roles were clearly defined and well established. In others, such as artificial intelligence and cybergovernance, the contribution and role of United Nations organizations might not yet have been agreed or could be strengthened.

79. The transformational role of technology was highlighted as a role that presented unique opportunities and threats for the world at large. While there remained much uncertainty surrounding many aspects of new technologies, it was acknowledged that the United Nations system needed to play a proactive role by promoting a human rights approach in furtherance of reduced inequalities, reduced risks and maximized transformational value.

80. The Committee noted that the High-level Committee on Programmes would play a key role in supporting upcoming CEB deliberations. At its September 2017 session, building on a light review of emerging issues undertaken previously, the High-level Committee on Programmes had discussed frontier issues in the domain of technology (biotechnology, cyberspace, new weaponry and artificial intelligence) and had conducted a deeper examination of select focus areas/nexuses of emerging challenges (artificial intelligence for good, the future of work and the future of food). Committee members were briefed on this ongoing work and its expected outcomes, while next steps would be determined following CEB deliberations.

81. The Secretary of the High-level Committee on Programmes briefed the Committee that there were profound socioeconomic, human rights and peace and security implications of the rapidly developing but largely unregulated "frontier technologies". While the papers it had developed served to provide input to CEB, they permitted the consideration of strategic entry points for the United Nations system, with a focus on normative, convening and capacity-building aspects. The cross-sectoral nature of these new technologies called for a United Nations system-wide approach. While recognizing the key role played by non-State actors over their developments, the High-level Committee on Programmes stressed that the United Nations had a unique role in providing an ethical compass and a moral voice to ensure that technologies evolved in line with universal values and standards and in promoting a multi-stakeholder dialogue.

82. In the discussion of the High-level Committee on Programmes, there had been support for, inter alia, establishing a panel of experts, partnering with the private sector and creating an inter-agency coordination of the High-level Committee on Programmes, there had been support for, inter alia, establishing a panel of experts, partnering with the private sector and creating an inter-agency coordination mechanism to ensure the embedding of relevant principles and practices in core programming. Issues that might require further research had been identified. The need for an engagement strategy had been raised, including dialogue through intergovernmental processes and with multi-stakeholders.

83. In this context, the Committee considered options to take forward the work conducted under the United Nations data innovation labs — a series of workshops that CEB had tasked UNICEF and WFP to organize in order to provide the system with the capability to investigate, design, develop, prototype and test applications of emerging digital data sources in support of global efforts to achieve the data revolution for sustainable development.

84. In the past two years, the innovation labs had brought together private sector partners, academic centres of excellence and leading experts in data privacy and lab participants had gained access to new types of data, data-mining and visualization technologies and new analytical methodologies.

85. The Committee decided to continue this work as part of the United Nations Innovation Network, focusing on data innovation, to address the most critical issues of improving knowledge exchange and managing partnerships.

V. Any other business

86. The Committee decided to relaunch a consultative process among Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) member organizations to discuss the development of a proposal on the operational model and funding approaches for the positions of FICSA elected officials. The World Health Organization offered to lead the consultations.